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ABSTRACT

Key government advisers in Europe today are asking what is so important about this so-called "higher life" that it should be allowed to stand in the way of more "relevant," more "appropriate" adult education--adult education that meets the "real needs" of the people, needs that are defined almost exclusively by the planners as economic and material needs. No matter how hard one tries to make distinctions among the terms "continuing or lifelong education," "education permanente," and "recurrent education," they have become the catch-words of competitive bureaucracies, each seeking leadership in what appears to all of them to be Europe's new growth industry in education--adult education in behalf of economic and material prosperity. European adult educators, in general, would appear to be accepting the trend as inevitable although some are quite reluctant about it. When one hears all these good words and the promises of progress through innovation in adult education, I think it would be wise for Europeans and North Americans alike to ponder longer and harder than they have as yet done. For, make no mistake, the issues confronting Europe are confronting us today in North America. (Author)

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European Adult Education Yesterday and Today: Some Questions Worth Pondering

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In 1926 Eduard Lindeman, the American adult educator, described European adult education after World War I. "In Denmark, Germany and England....," he wrote, "classes may begin with the study of economic problems but before the learning process has gone far the vague consciousness that man does not live by bread alone becomes manifest; the demand that learning shall point the way toward what is euphemistically called the 'higher life' is never wholly submerged...."[1]

Much has happened in Europe since 1926, of course. Depression, the fascist experience, war, continuing communist pressure, the development of increasingly urbanized and industrialized societies that require ever-changing skills, and now economic stagflation accompanied by persistent unemployment. All have taken their toll on the European wish for education in tune with what Lindeman termed the "higher life."

Key government advisers in Europe today are asking what is so important about this so-called "higher life" that it should be allowed to stand in the way of more "relevant," more "appropriate" adult education -- adult education that meets the "real needs" of the people, needs that are defined almost exclusively by the planners as economic and material needs.

The rhetoric of the planners does not blatantly reject the "higher life" as it seeks converts to one or the other of at least three different phrasings of a materialist philosophy. UNESCO speaks in almost existential language about utilizing continuing or lifelong education in "Learning to Be."[2] The Council of Europe competes with UNESCO by developing its own slogan, education permanente. And the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development counters with the motto it promotes, namely, recurrent education. No matter how hard one tries to make distinctions among these

terms,[3] continuing or lifelong education and education permanente and recurrent education have become the catchwords of competitive bureaucracies, each seeking leadership in what appears to all of them to be Europe's new growth industry in education -- adult education in behalf of economic and material prosperity. Any talk by these organizations of the higher life is a smokescreen. Their primary, indeed their only, interests are economic.

Much of the intellectual underpinning of this drive comes from Sweden.[4] There the prime minister, Olaf Palme, has supported this kind of adult education since his days in the education portfolio. What most appeals to the planners in the rest of Europe, and in the rest of the world for that matter, is the apparent cooperation in Sweden between the trade unions and the employers in undertaking adult education for economic prosperity. The Swedish example offers planners the possibility, or the illusion, of achieving social harmony through adult education.

In tune with this presently dominant Swedish philosophy, a professor at the University of Stockholm has urged that adult education become part of the social insurance systems of European nations. Workers would contribute portions of their salaries into an education fund during good economic times. When technological changes or reverses in the economy cause a reduction in demand for their skills, then these workers can use their prepaid adult education insurance, in essence, to buy a new package of skills to be learned, skills which may be in more demand at that time.[5]

This plan and the Swedish philosophy itself sound quite reasonable and humane until one thinks more deeply. The ulterior motive is clearly

a bureaucratic interest in keeping the unemployed off the streets, busy learning new skills, and full of hope for the future. In the view of the social planners, such education can be useful in providing smoother transitions in a changing technology and between business cycles.

The philosopher of adult education, however, must analyze the impact on the essence of adult education of this instrumental use of it as a counter-cyclical device and as a social harmonizer. It shouldn't take long to recognize the serious impact in associating adult education with the Gross National Product, with manpower training, and with efforts for achieving social control. Eduard Lindeman warned us about this in 1926. He feared what he called "the pitfalls which have vulgarized public education."[6] Lindeman wrote that, in his view, adult education "begins where vocational education leaves off. Its purpose is to put meaning into the whole of life."[7] He quoted the British adult educator, Basil Yeaxlee, in defining the most meaningful, worthwhile, and true adult education as "friends educating each other."[8]

It is precisely this personal, free, experiential, dialogical form of adult education that European economic planners have put on the defensive today with charges that it is irrelevant and inappropriate to the material needs of the people. The planners call for increased access for the people to an <u>improved</u> adult education that will help people hold and get jobs.[9] Step one has been taken on Lindeman's path to vulgarization. Step two in this logic is inexorable. If this societal enterprise of job preparation and social harmonizing is to be government-supported and carried out efficiently, trained experts must be appointed to package the proper knowledge. Knowledge thus becomes defined as teacher-structured data.

Government support of any enterprise in a world dominated by business procedures leads to step three, judgment of the extent to which the trainee has mastered the prescribed content. But, wait, in applying business values to education the mastery situation becomes perverse. Measurement of student mastery of subject matter is not the nature of the situation at all. Application of industrial techniques of evaluation in education leads to a judgment of the extent to which the subject matter has possessed or mastered the individual's mind, soul, and behavior. The educational subject matter, because it is funded by the state, becomes more important than the individual. This once-human being is viewed by the thoroughly modern millers of adult education as just another sack of Martha White Flour that they are to control for "quality."

Having accepted step three as the real purpose of their work, it's an easy next step for adult educators to become enamored of research and study that seeks to improve technology dedicated to changing the individual and adjusting him to the status quo or to the new society the planners are seeking to bring in.[10] Program planning, evaluation, and other methods of adult education become subverted to the support of education" as the method of indirect social restraint" that American sociologist E.A. Ross noted in his 1901 study, Social Control.[11] It would seem that once you let yourself be talked out of the philosophy of adult education as "friends educating each other" it is easy to be sucked toward a leadership responsibility that may ultimately turn into social control.

European adult educators, in general, would appear to be accepting the trend as inevitable although some are quite reluctant about it.[12] They are accepting and encouraging program planning, evaluation, and research

based on technicist social control values.[13] They are thus encouraging the application at the adult level of what I called in my book schooling's Quest for Conformity. The patron saint of European adult education, Danish Lutheran Bishop Nicolai Grundtvig, still holds a hallowed place among adult educators in Europe. But his exhortations in behalf of experiential learning seem to have been forgotten under the pressure of government planners and government moneys.

Some serious questioning of the trend is occurring, but mostly by those deemed to be outside the narrow profession of adult education.[14] The most extreme, yet perhaps the most realistic and understanding questioning of the philosophy motivating adult education in Europe today came last spring in an article in the London Times Educational Supplement by Etienne Verne and Ivan Illich. They wrote:

> "The institutionalization of permanent education will transform society into an enormous planet-sized classroom watched over by a few satellites. Only the labels will enable one to distinguish it from an enormous hospital ward, from a planetary mental home and from a penitentiary universe, where education, punishment, medical care and imprisonment are synonymous. The industrial method of teaching will be replaced by an even more destructive post-industrial conditioning."

Adult education has not yet reached that point in Europe. But it may well be on its way. Let me exemplify my argument by reference to recent developments in West Germany.

German economic and social planners have encouraged the Adult Education Centers or Volkshochschulen to break away from their traditional commitment to liberal adult education and to engage in more economically-oriented professional and vocational education. The seminal publication, "A Structural Plan for the Educational System," produced by the prestigious German Council for Education in 1970 helped push the Centers along this path. It redefined adult education as continuing education and officially blessed it "as part of the general system of education...."[15]

Key figures associated with the Volkshochschule movement could see the directions the planners were pointing. Joachim Knoll, a professor of adult education at the University of the Ruhr and an adviser to the Adult Education Centers movement, urged "a total break with the previous self-concept of adult education which understood itself to be at a distance from the state, the school, and public education -- a break which will result in manifold administrative and other consequences."[16] Voluntarism, a lack of prerequisites, and adult freedom in program planning might have to go, he wrote, if the West German Adult Education Centers were to integrate themselves, as he wanted them to, into the school system and into employer-sponsored educational leave programs.[17]

Let me repeat just what Knoll was ready to trade for what he thought might be a more relevant adult education dedicated increasingly to economic development and therefore worthy of much expanded government funding. He was ready to give up the crucial adult education principle of voluntarism. He was ready to accept the rigidities of schooling in adult education. And he expressed openness to reassessing the notion of the freedom of adults

to plan their own programs. Knoll expressed little interest in a view of adult education as "friends educating each other" or in a philosophy that assumes that the adult must be treated as an autonomous human being. The apparent openness to "innovation" of Knoll and his colleagues, it seems to me, is simply the acceptance of traditional patterns of schooling. The "innovations" are luring the German Adult Education Centers into "the pitfalls" which Lindeman charged had already "vulgarized public education."

A series of field trips to Volkshochschulen in Bavaria and in the Ruhr convinced me of the soundness of my philosophical analysis. One of the new programs in many of the Centers that has been successful in meeting the so-called "real needs" of the German people has been a Volkshochschule Certificate Program. The Adult Education Centers affirm to employers and others that the adult participants in these certificate classes have achieved a particular level of competency in the subject. Some employers provide leave time, financial support, and eventually even salary increases for their employees who participate in these particular Volkshochschule classes. Employers therefore want some sort of proof that the people they're underwriting are doing a competent job of learning.

While employer requests for proof may seem eminently reasonable from an employer point of view, Center acceptance of the certification concept has led to the acceptance of the notions of assessment and examination, formerly anathema to adult education. Acceptance of assessment has led to acceptance of the concept of academic standards with its content control and its quality control. Acceptance of this concept has led to acceptance of the notion of objectivity in the development, administration, and grading of the examinations. Acceptance of the concept of objectivity

has led to vesting the examination in a central organization. Now a standardized examination is administered to all the certificate classes by one agency in Frankfurt. The local teachers may well become "teaching machines" who prepare their charges to do well on the standardized and practical tests. If the central test for a language course, for example, is likely to emphasize grammar and to downplay the cultural aspects, all the classes will tend to do likewise. Those participants with major interest in culture will have great difficulty getting any class to shift emphasis as long as any participant is enrolled for ultimate examination and certification. The willingness to innovate and meet a simple employer request for proof of achievement in certain Volkshochschule classes is threatening to sweep from these classes most of the opportunity for truly humane liberal adult education and for meaningful student influence over content.[18] Instead of letting other existing institutions or the employers themselves provide this vocational and professional training, the German Adult Education Centers are mimicking the worst elements of schooling and are thus becoming, in Lindeman's word, "vulgarized."

Another example of this vulgarization can be seen in the Alpine ski town of Garmisch-Partenkirchen.[19] The young Volkshochschule director there, Peter Lehmberg, has shifted his Center from a relaxed cultural operation serving a relatively small clientele of older people to a slam-bang, vocational, media-based learning center that draws a bigger and more varied group of participants. He has increased the Center's income some seven-fold in five years. He has worked from sixty to seventy hours a week in equipping and engineering a technologically elaborate language laboratory and in convincing the small industries and army mountain division commander

in his area to rely on his Center to provide vocational training for their employees and troopers.

This adult education administrator insisted that political education had no place in his technocratic institution. Free-wheeling discussion of politics, economics, and religion could menace his good relationships with business and with the military. Lehmberg is one of the increasing number of "innovators" in the German Adult Education Centers who value vocationalism and technicism over liberal adult education. Lehmberg's hard and dedicated work is helping to vulgarize German adult education although, of course, Lehmberg would not see it that way. Indeed, his more toward technicism seems to be appreciated by the power structure in a Germany that is today tending toward the political right.

All of this vulgarizing is going on behind a screen of good sounding rhetoric and even, in many cases, with the best of intentions on the part of the adult educators involved. Helmuth Dolff of the German Adult Education Centers really believes that the turn toward schooling will enable his institution "to do more justice to all groups and sections of our people, and to come closer to our chosen aim of serving all citizens of our country."[20]

In Britain those adult educators who have been seeking to break down English commitment to adult education as strictly liberal, non-vocational, non-examinable, and non-credit have attempted to advance behind a nobly phrased purpose. They have been using the w[illegible] of the Russell Report, urging "the systematic expansion of the active areas of adult education into those parts of the population at present untouched."[21]

When one hears all these good words and the promises of progress through innovation in adult education, I think it would be wise for Europeans and North Americans alike to ponder longer and harder than they have as yet

done. For, make no mistake, the issues confronting Europe are confronting us today in North America.

Eduard Lindeman was speaking to Americans in 1926 when he warned that "we have become habituated to a method of achievement which is antithetical to intelligence. We measure results quantitatively."[22] It would be well if Europeans and Americans took to heart Lindeman's warning to adult educators to avoid any bandwagon approach to our field. Lindeman's apparently forgotten warning of 1926 best summarizes the situation today in European adult education. "The chief danger which confronts adult education," he wrote, "lies in the possibility that we may 'Americanize' it before we understand its meaning."[23]

Footnotes

[1] Eduard C. Lindeman, The Meaning of Adult Education, (Montreal: Harvest House, 1961), pp. 64 and 65.

[2] Edgar Faure, et.al., Learning to Be, (Paris: UNESCO, 1972).

[3] Vincent Houghton, et.al., Recurrent Education -- an Alternative Future? (Milton Keynes, England: The Open University Press, 1974), p. 12.

[4] Ibid., p. 13, and discussions with European adult educators at "Access to Continuing Education" Conference, Oxford University, England, July 1-3, 1975.

[5] Gosta Rehn, speech at "Access to Continuing Education" Conference, Oxford University, England, July 1, 1975.

[6] Lindeman, op. cit., pp. 7 and 8.

[7] Ibid., p. 5.

[8] Ibid., p. 7.

[9] Rehn, op. cit.

[10] Examples of this sort of in-service training material can be seen in the "Theory and Practice of Adult Education" series produced by the Pädagogische Arbeitsstelle of the German Adult Education Centers Association.

[11] Edward A. Ross, Social Control, (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1901), p. 176 of 1918 edition.

[12] Interview with Franz Rieger, director of the Munich Adult Education Center, February 10, 1975.

[13] See, for example, the scientistic technological approach -- complete with models and other mechanistic accoutrements -- of the publications in the "Theory and Practice of Adult Education" series produced for German adult educators by the Volkshochschule's in-service training organization.

[14] Ivan Illich and Etienne Verne, London Times Educational Supplement, March 21, 1975, pp. 21-23, and Heinrich Dauber and Etienne Verne, eds., Freiheit zum Lernen, (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1976).

[15] Helmuth Dolff, director of the German Adult Education Centers Association, "Can the Volkshochschulen of Today Answer the Requirements of Adult Education for Tomorrow?" mimeographed statement produced at the Deutscher Volkshochschul-Verband headquarters in Bonn.

[16] Joachim Knoll, Einführung in die Erwachsenenbildung, (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1973), p. 73.

[17] Ibid., p. 184.

[18] This interpretation of the Volkshochschule foreign language program is not the one heard from representatives of the German Centers. While there are critics within and without the organization, the official line is one of pride for an innovative examination system, a system that takes account of the practical needs and interests of adults and excludes esoteric cultural rambles into academic literature. Much of the well-meaning rhetoric is devoted to the need for any "systems approach" to be learner-oriented. The rhetoric, however, does not gainsay the reality.

[19] This analysis is based on a visit and discussion with Garmisch-Partenkirchen Volkshochschule Director Peter Lehmberg in his Center, March 19, 1975.

[20] Dolff, op. cit.

[21] E.L. Russell, Adult Education: A Plan for Development, (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1973), p. 22, and discussions with participants at the "Access to Continuing Education" Conference, Oxford University, England, July 1-3, 1975.

[22] Lindeman, op. cit., p. xxx.

[23] Ibid.